

1 JUAN DOMINGUEZ,

2 Plaintiff,

3 v.

4 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
5 FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

6

7 No. C-09-03611 EDL

8 **ORDER DENYING MOTION TO**  
9 **STRIKE EXPERT DESIGNATION OF**  
10 **ROBERT WOHLFERD**

11 EXCEL MANUFACTURING CO. INC.,

12 Defendant.  
13

14 This is a personal injury action brought by Plaintiff Juan Dominguez and his wife Juana  
15 Dominguez against machine manufacturer Excel Manufacturing Co. (“Excel”) relating to injuries  
16 sustained by Plaintiff during his use of a “horizontal baler” machine in the course of his  
17 employment. Plaintiff moves to strike one of Defendant’s experts, Robert Wohlfeld, on the basis  
18 that he was not timely disclosed as an industry standards expert and did not submit an expert report.  
19 For the following reasons, the motion to strike Mr. Wohlfeld as an expert is DENIED.

20 **Background**

21 On January 29, 2010, this Court issued a Case Management Order industry standards and  
other expert discovery and providing that:

22 Initial expert disclosures on the topic of industry standards shall be made no later  
23 than May 28, 2010. Rebuttal expert disclosures on the topic of industry standards  
24 shall be made no later than June 25, 2010. The deadline for deposing industry  
experts is July 16, 2010.

25 . . .  
26 Initial expert disclosures on all topics other than industry standards shall be made  
27 no later than October 8, 2010. Rebuttal expert disclosures on all topics other than  
industry standards shall be made no later than October 22, 2010. All treating  
physicians who will provide opinion testimony beyond that which can be  
provided by a lay person must be disclosed as expert witnesses, but they need not  
prepare expert reports unless ordered to do so by the Court.

28 See Dkt. # 21. Following some confusion on Defendant’s part about whether simultaneous  
exchange of initial expert disclosures was required by the Order, the Court modified the dates set as

1 follows:

2 Defendant is required to disclose its initial expert report combined with any  
3 rebuttal to Plaintiff's expert report by June 25, 2010; Plaintiff shall have until July  
4 23, 2010 for a rebuttal of Defendant's initial expert report; The deadline for  
deposing industry experts shall be extended until August 15, 2010; The deadline  
for filing dispositive motions shall be extended to August 31, 2010 and the  
hearing on any such motion shall be no later than October 5, 2010; All parties'  
initial expert disclosures on all topics other than industry standards shall be made  
no later than October 19, 2010; All parties' rebuttal expert disclosures on all  
topics other than industry standards shall be made no later than November 2,  
2010;All expert discovery shall be completed by November 16, 2010;

8 See Dkt. # 30 (bullet points excluded).

9 In its Initial Disclosures on December 1, 2009, Defendant identified Mr. Wohlfeld  
10 as a witness and provided the following description: "Bob Wohlfeld, Service Manager of  
11 Excel Manufacturing Co., Inc. The subject of information known by this witness includes  
12 communications with the owner of the baler/plaintiff's employer; *industry standards*; the  
13 training, manuals, labels and instructions provided with the subject baler; maintenance of  
14 the baler; and repairs made to the baler." See Flynn Decl. Ex. A (emphasis added). On  
15 June 25, 2010, Defendant disclosed Roman Beyer as its industry standards expert and  
16 provided an expert report prepared by him. See Daubert Motion at 3-4; Flynn Decl. iso  
17 Daubert Motion Ex. E. Excel did not disclose Mr. Wohlfeld as an industry standards  
18 expert at that time. Thereafter, Mr. Wohlfeld was identified as the person most  
19 knowledgeable regarding the design and manufacture of the subject baler and deposed for  
20 over five hours on October 6, 2010. Flynn Decl. Ex. B. After his deposition, on October  
21 19, 2010, Defendant disclosed additional experts including, among others: "Robert  
22 Wohlfeld, Excel Manufacturing Company, Inc. Mr. Wohlfeld will testify about the design,  
23 manufacture and operation of the subject baler. He will also testify regarding the national  
24 standards relating to the subject baler." See Ramos Decl. Ex. A. No report or summary of  
25 qualifications has been provided for Mr. Wohlfeld. Id.

26 **Legal Standard**

27 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 26 requires parties to disclose the identity of their  
28 expert witnesses. Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(a)(2)(A). Expert witnesses must be disclosed in

1 accordance with the deadlines ordered by the court. Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(a)(2)(C).  
2 Additionally, “if the witness is one retained or specially employed to provide expert  
3 testimony in the case or one whose duties as the party’s employee regularly involve giving  
4 expert testimony,” the disclosure must be accompanied by a written report. Fed. R. Civ. P.  
5 26(a)(2)(B).

6 Failure to disclose an expert witness or provide the required information results in  
7 exclusion of the expert witness “unless the failure was substantially justified or is  
8 harmless.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(c)(1). The Ninth Circuit has held that district courts have  
9 discretion “to allow expert testimony in appropriate circumstances,” even when Rule 26 is  
10 violated. The four factors for courts to consider in evaluating harmlessness and  
11 justification are: “(1) prejudice or surprise to the party against whom the evidence is  
12 offered; (2) the ability of that party to cure the prejudice; (3) the likelihood of disruption of  
13 the trial; and (4) bad faith or willfulness involved in not timely disclosing the evidence.”  
14 Lanard Toys, Ltd. v. Novelty, Inc., 375 Fed. Appx. 705, 713 (9th Cir. Cal. Apr. 13, 2010)  
15 (holding that the district court did not abuse its discretion in allowing plaintiff’s expert to  
16 testify, even though plaintiff did not serve a timely, complete expert report, since the  
17 violation was non-prejudicial). The burden of proving an excuse is on the party facing  
18 sanctions. See Yeti by Molly, Ltd. v. Deckers Outdoor Corp., 259 F.3d 1101, 1107 (9th  
19 Cir. 2001) (“Implicit in Rule 37(c)(1) is that the burden is on the party facing sanctions to  
20 prove harmlessness”). The Court has discretion in issuing such sanctions. Id. at 1106  
21 (“Furthermore, although we review every discovery sanction for an abuse of discretion, we  
22 give particularly wide latitude to the district court’s discretion to issue sanctions under  
23 Rule 37(c)(1).”).

24 **Analysis**

25 Plaintiff moves to strike Mr. Wohlfeld as an expert on all topics on the basis that he  
26 was not timely disclosed as an industry standards expert by the June 25 deadline and no  
27 expert report has been provided for him. Excel counters that Mr. Wohlfeld was disclosed  
28 in its Initial Disclosures and deposed as a person most knowledgeable, and that this

1 deposition included questioning regarding industry standards, so its failure to disclose him  
2 in its industry standards disclosure was harmless. See Flynn Decl. Ex. B (Wohlfeld Depo.)  
3 at 94-95, 113-119, 125-139.

4 Neither party cites or analyzes the four factors to be considered in evaluating  
5 justification and harmlessness. Plaintiff notes that, during Mr. Wohlfeld's deposition, he  
6 was questioned on issues within the scope of his employment and “[t]he usual background  
7 questioning of expert qualification was not rendered.” Reply at 2. However, Plaintiff does  
8 not refute Excel's point that Mr. Wohlfeld was disclosed as knowledgeable about industry  
9 standards in Excel's initial disclosures and questioned regarding industry standards during  
10 his deposition, or otherwise explain how it has been prejudiced by the failure to timely  
11 disclose him as an industry standards expert. Thus, it does not appear that Plaintiff has  
12 been prejudiced and there is no argument that the failure will disrupt the trial schedule or  
13 was done in bad faith. Therefore, Mr. Wohlfeld will not be stricken for failure to timely  
14 disclose him since he was disclosed and deposed on industry standards.

15 With respect to an expert report, Excel argues that it was not required to produce a  
16 report for Mr. Wohlfeld because he is an employee and not a retained or in-house expert.  
17 Plaintiff counters that, despite the language of Rule 26(a)(2)(B), “a majority of courts  
18 require reports from employee experts who render opinions on matters outside the scope of  
19 their employment.” Funai Electric Co. v. Daewoo Electronics Corp., 2007 U.S. Dist.  
20 LEXIS 29782 (N.D. Cal. 2007) (Larson, J.). However, the plain language of Rule  
21 (a)(2)(B) states that no report is required of Mr. Wohlfeld because he is admittedly not a  
22 retained or in-house expert, and even if were, any omission was not prejudicial. The  
23 Motion is therefore DENIED.

24 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

25 Dated: December 20, 2010

  
26 ELIZABETH D. LAPORTE  
27 United States Magistrate Judge  
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